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John Muir Newsletter, July/August 1983

Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies

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JOHN MUIR NEWSLETTER



Holt-Atherton Pacific Center
for Western Studies

University of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif 95211

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FUNDING UPDATE

As we go to press we have not yet received formal word, but our "unimpeachable sources" tell us we are about to receive a major grant that will provide most of the Project funding for 1984. The next newsletter will hopefully fill in the details, but we could not wait to share the good news.

DATING MUIR MANUSCRIPTS

In previous editions we have descibed the complexities of the Manuscript Series in the Muir Collection. Happily we can now report the completeion of the control system for this bulky segment, composed of some 11,000 holograph and typescript pages in over 460 separate entries between 1865 and 1914. Aside from conserving, collating, dating, and titling the documents that had long suffered from neglect and disintergration, the most difficult editorial task was to determine the chronological sequence of multiple drafts and versions of specific works that evolved out of journal entries into major publications.

Unquestionably Travels in Alaska was the hardest literary spoor to trace. Starting with the original journals, part of which first surfaced in San Francisco Bulletin articles of the 1880s and early '90s, we established that Muir went to work on a major Alaska manuscript soon after the publication of The Mountains of California in 1894. He prepared two notebooks based on earlier journals, but laid these aside as Yosemite politics and the forestry battles sidetracked his literary efforts. Not until after 1910 did he once again take up the Alaska manuscript. Evidently unsatisfied with the revisions of the 1890s, he returned to his original journals for inspiration and narrative drafts, using only bits and pieces of published and dictated material prepared after the 1890 Alaska excursion. By 1913 typists had prepared a ribbon copy and at least two carbons of nearly all his 1879 and 1880 field notes. Frustrated by the antipodal forces of perfectionism and old age, burdened by intermittant attacks of "the Grippe," Muir reassembled and revised these typescripts over

and over again. Project staff have located and indentified at least thirty-six different versions of the Alaska text prepared between 1913 and 1914, one of which lay on Muir's bed the day he died. Rather than combine later chapter revisions into an integrated text, William F. Bade in 1915 retyped what became the published version from an earlier draft that Muir had last worked on in 1913.

A VALUABLE BOOK COLLECTION COMPLEMENTS THE MUIR PAPERS

One year ago we reported the acquisition of the Mary Louise Brown Collection of Muiriana, an extensive research and reference file given to the Holt-Atherton Pacific Center by a very gracious and generous Arizona benefactress. This Summer Mrs. Brown iced the cake with a magnificent supplement of some 200 volumes from her personal library. A devoted friend of the wilderness, Mrs. Brown for years had collected the published works of celebrated figures in the conservation movement. Now these handsome volumes, many scarce and nearly all first editions in excellent condition, are located at the University of the Pacific as part of the Brown Collection in the Holt-Atherton Pacific Center. Included are not only John Muir's published works, but also nearly complete collections of John Burroughs, Sigurd Olson, Enos Mills, C. F. Lummis, Ernest Thompson Seton, and other prominent writers. All students of the wilderness movement have Mrs. Brown to thank for making this immensely important collection available for scholarly research.

A NEW MUIR FAMILY COLLECTION COMES TO STOCKTON

Late in July, Project staff received a major addition to the Muir Papers, consisting of 368 items that had been tied up in an estate settlement for the past two years. Among the highlights: 36 holograph letters from John Muir to family and friends; a Muir journal, "Alps and Little Yosemite" (July-August, 1873), which had not been available since Linnie Marsh Wolfe prepared excerpts from it in the 1930's; two holograph poems by Muir, including an amusing doggerel entitled "Conspiracy to Eat a Baldheaded Scotchman"; five untitled Muir sketches; a holograph letter from Asa Gray to the LeConte brothers in Berkeley; 67 letters from Muir's daughters, Helen and Wanda, to family members; more than 100 photoprints of John Muir and the immediate family, including what may be the only known picture of Daniel Muir, John Muir's father. The scope and substance of this addition make it one of the most significant Muir "finds" in recent years. Our heartfelt thanks to the Muir-Hanna family members whose cooperation and persistance enabled this invaluable collection to be added to the Microform Project.

CLIPPING FROM THE MUIR COLLECTION

This lengthy article by Anna Pratt Simpson, a West Coast journalist, first appeared in the San Francisco Sunday Chronicle Supplement, May 13, 1906. Two short paragraphs, not about Muir, have been deleted.

JOHN MUIR FINDS ARIZONA'S PETRIFIED FORESTS FIVE MILLION YEARS OLD

John Muir, the Thoreau of California, the man who coaxes Nature's best-guarded secrets from her, has made another valuable contribution to the annals of geology. He has discovered that the petrified forests near Adamana, Arizona, are at least 5,000,000 years old.

Several months ago the precarious health of Miss Helen Muir sent her father with her to this out-of-doors sanatorium. Together they have gone through all the forests known to the casual traveler and through these farther over in the wilderness, where the indisputable evidences have been found of the approximate birthday of the giant forests, turned to silica by the wonder of the ages, and now uncovered that the present may know something of the genesis of geology, and see a tangible link between the far-off then and complex now.

Despite the fact that the Adamana forests were discovered back in the middle fifties, when the United States government sent out an engineer corps to survey for the best possible railroad route across the continent, no investigations of scientific value have been made until circumstances took John Muir away from his home in the Alhambra Valley to the country for so long one of the preserves of the Apache Indians.

This does not argue that these petrified forests have not been known and coveted during this half century. Vandals found their way there and the man of commercial instinct had his inning and tourists have come to this wonderland and have taken away the souvenirs, to which they were welcome, but scientists have not been wandering that way. And so it has remained for John Muir to add to his important contributions to science another splendid chapter.

Talking recently with John Muir about his latest work was a rare privilege. Always reposeful and never without a delightful sense of humor, the accumulating years have added greater charm to his personality and his conversations. As he talked on of the forest and the land that time eroded for the study of this age, his story, simple, honest and convincing, carried me quite away from the busy turmoil of the day.

"The general character of the country of the petrified forest is brown," he explained, "but nothing can equal the glory of the color revealed in the heart of the trees. Nature knows how to mix fast colors. In this vast laboratory of her she has made the most beautiful silica in the world, and incidentally has chipped off bits to fashion wondrous amethysts and the purest crystals. Particularly are the amethysts beautiful. They are found in the hollows of the trees."

He told in interesting detail how a number of years ago some New Yorkers, discovering the treasures of the forests near Adamana, made a compact with the people of this apparently no-man's land, and before the government could intervene, tons of the silica and crystals were shipped East. The Federal authorities took cognizance of the depredations and gathered into the fold of the government national parks this vast section. The confiscated treasure was made into tables and pedestals and a great variety of ornamental pieces, the owners of them never knowing, perhaps how unique a belonging they had. Outside of declaring possession and taking most casual measures for protection of the forest, the government has done nothing until the present time, when certain enactments are in the making to place them on a footing similar to that of other wonderlands of the government.

"Petrified forests elsewhere are mere babies compared with those in Arizona," declared John Muir. "Proof of this statement I did not find in the three duly registered forests, six, seven and eight miles from Adamana, but in one which my daughter and I discovered fully ten miles to the north of this place and exactly in the opposite direction from the beaten path. We went out

into this interesting wilderness [on] horseback and there found the fossils of sigillaria, the unmistakable token of the carboniferous age. On one of them I noted the peculiar markings, the leaf scars, which are distributed spirally around the stems, similarly to those found on the lepidodendron. This geological record shows that the forests cannot be less than 5,000,000 years old--how much more no man can tell."...

"It goes without saying," said Mr. Muir, "that all the trees are down, but they are noble specimens. One I found was ten feet in circumference 100 feet from the base. They are mostly coniferous, which would not add anything in verification of geological age, for they have been found in every period. There is not a forest standing today of the same kind, as I understand it, except one great expanse I saw in Australia on my recent tour around the world."

Quaintly Mr. Muir described this forest until I felt like taking the boat for the Antipodes. He said that the things above all else he wanted to see in Australia were the forests of eucalypti. While locating the best specimens he heard of the one which to him stands today as a type of what the petrified forests at Adamana must have been. He pictured the Australia grove as having three stories, and said that it had none of the heavy undergrowth so common in forests of this country. The first story was of fern trees, the second of pines and the third of eucalyptus. Through the fronds and foilage of these beautiful trees the sunlight filters, dappling the rich earth that here and there has splotches of wild flowers to add to its marvel. This, he said, was absolutely a primeval forest....

It is likely that John Muir will spend considerable time in Arizona, coming north occasionally, so without doubt he will soon contribute detailed and illustrated data on his discoveries in the petrified forests, a most alluring field. In the meantime, it is interesting to know that one may contemplate a 5,000,000-year-old record that is beautiful as well as scientifically important.

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